

# THE HUMANS FROM ZOLAT EL HAMMAD (SUDAN) A STATUS REPORT

Friedrich BERGER

Communication présentée lors de la réunion de l'AARS, Pinerolo, 8-9 Mai 1998

The petroglyph site Zolat el Hammad is located about mid-way between Wadi Howar and El Natrun (Atrun) in Northern Sudan. The inventory includes various kinds of depictions of bovids, giraffes, antelopes, ostriches, elephants, other animals, and humans (Berger, 1997). The humans were the subject of the presentation.

The humans from Zolat el Hammad are characterised by a circular, sometimes slightly oval head sitting on a thin long body. The diameter of the head is always large. The figures are stationary and in front view. Arms and legs are thin, the arms hanging down. In some cases the arms are missing or only stumps are shown. The shoulders are emphasised and the thighs as well. Some humans have a single straight line rising vertically from their heads (Fig. 1). These figures occur single or in groups, but without interaction. On the basis of patina and, in some cases, superposition the humans are the oldest engravings at this site. Similar depictions are not known up to now. The younger petroglyphs include many bovids which are thought to be domesticated.

In order to possibly develop a relationship of the humans with depictions in other areas on a stylistic basis three criteria were used:

- the straight line on the head,
- the trunk and the head,
- the missing arms.

A line on the top of a human head normally represents a feather for decoration or to demonstrate a rank. A single straight line is rare, otherwise in rock art bent lines and several lines are more common.

Combinations of trunk and head in a similar style can be seen in the Ennedi mountains and in the Mourdi area (Fuchs, Bailloud, Faleschini, Faleschini et al., Choppy et al.) as well as in the Aïr (Lhote, Muzzolini). In paintings it becomes clear that the large diameter of the head can be explained by a hair trimming (Bailloud).

The lack of arms seems to be unique in rock art. There are, however, many examples in the mobile art of the Nile valley:

- el Kadada near Shendi (Sudan): women without arms, with coiffures, early fourth millennium B.C. (Reinold et al.);
- Badarian, Naqada I, Naqada II: mostly females and some males, arms missing or stumps only, 5500 - 3100 B.C. (Baumgartel, El-Yahky);
- Kerma: clay figurines with indications of arms, 3000 - 1500 B.C. (Bonnet et al.);

- C-Group: sitting female figures with arm and leg stumps, 2300 - 1500 B.C. (Bonnet).

Besides the specific attributes of the humans at Zolat el Hammad, the general context of the site with respect to changes of climate, to archaeology and linguistic information was studied.

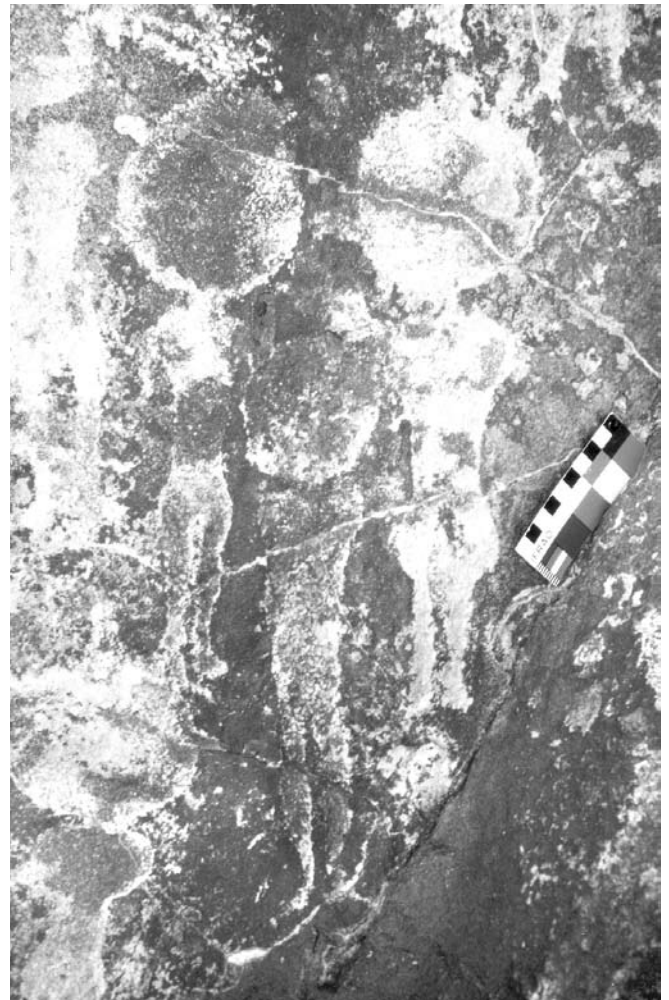


Fig. 1.

The improvement of the climatic conditions after about 10000 B.P. and the deterioration to the present situation from 5200 to 3000 B.P. (Neumann) suggest a migration from south to north initially followed by a retreat later. On the basis of linguistic studies (Behrens) it is assumed that the proto-Berber speakers separated from the Afroasiatic language group around the 7/6-th millennium B.C. and migrated from SE/S into the (then) savanna areas of the (now) Sahara. They

represent the Temehu of the Egyptian sources and later were known as the C-Group in the Nile valley. Another group of proto-Berber speakers may have crossed the Sahara west of the Hoggar (Behrens), spread west and east, and threatened Egypt in considerable numbers at the Delta. In addition or alternatively the proto-Berber speakers may have used the route Wadi Howar - Ennedi - Erg Idrisi - Jebel Uweinat - Cyrenaica (Cornelius, Pachur).

Ceramic finds do not support a south-north migration in the Libyan Desert (e.g. Richter, Schuck). In the north a relationship between Gilf Kebir, Nabta Playa, Laqiya area, and the Nile valley may demonstrate the retreat of people (Schön, Wendorf, Wendorf et al., McKim Malville). Between Wadi Howar and Ennedi an east-west connection exists (Keding). In conclusion, the artists who created the petroglyphs with fresh patina in Zolat el Hammad may have been proto-Berber speaking pastoralists migrating north. The tradition of making armless figurines existed in the Nile valley earlier than this migration. The strongly patinated humans with the circular heads at Zolat el Hammad may have been made under influence from the Nile valley prior to or at an early phase of the migration. The comparable paintings in the Ennedi area represent a tradition of pastoralists. Thus, there seems an east-west directed cultural element to be superimposed on a south-north migration.

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